Queer Spaces as Counterpublics

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Abstract

This paper investigates how queer women and nonbinary people (referred to as non-males) find space within a heteronormative context that actively resists their existence. In their modes of formation, these spaces actively resist the straightening and commodification of queerness and empower the community in a subversion of patriarchal norms. Using Seattle's context, the authors investigate historic queer non-male spaces along with two contemporary case studies using archival research, oral histories, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. The result is an identification and examination of two different forms of counterpublic spaces utilized by the queer non-male community to create locations of queer belonging: the exclusive/inclusive space, investigated through the case study of a local lesbian bar, and the non-exclusive/inclusive space, represented through the case study of a women's sports bar. Both serve as places of resistance and empowerment. While both create spaces of belonging for queer non-males, the former achieves this by establishing an exclusive space, while the latter does so through a non-exclusive space that actively supports queer non-males. By engaging the inclusive/exclusive dichotomy the cases offer insights into the complex dynamics of identity, community and belonging for queer non-males.

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Queer Spaces as Counterpublics

Counterpublic spaces have been described in urban studies literature as those that are in direct conflict with the dominant public, where marginalized groups are able to exert agency in their own identities through "parallel discursive arenas" (Warner 2002, 85). Scholars have looked at counterpublic spaces as places of lived resistance, where the repeated decision to act in one's own identity in a way that runs counter to dominant social norms culminates in broader, community-based resistance (Cohen 2004). Nancy Fraser (1990) coined the term Subaltern counterpublics, which arise in response

to exclusions within mainstream public spheres. These arenas allow marginalized groups to construct oppositional discourses about their identities and needs, promoting participatory parity. Although queer populations have broadly been understood as forming counterpublics (Warner 2002), we argue that within the mainstreaming of the "gayborhood" and privileging of the gay white cis male, there exist subaltern counterpublics of more marginalized queer communities.[1] The paper uses this framework to analyze the formation of queer counterpublics by queer non-males. We use an analysis of queer non-male space in Seattle, Washington to understand the various forms of these counterpublics. Ultimately, we determine that there is a tension between the exclusive/inclusive and non-exclusive/inclusive counterpublic. In other words, queer non-male counterpublic spaces create sites of resistance through either catering to specific identities or by fostering inclusive spaces for amplifying marginalized voices.

Queer spaces, or spaces where queer people feel comfortable to freely express their queerness, have consistently been identified as counterpublics (Warner 2002, Sismondo 2017). Throughout history, such spaces have served as hubs for political organizing and refuge for the queer community from law enforcement (Bitterman & Hess 2021). They also have provided safe spaces for the queer community to enact their "othered" identities in affirming ways. In contemporary times, although queer spaces for the most part exist without legal impediments in many American cities (Branton & Compton 2021), the queer community continues to encounter opposition. Notably, this includes transgender people who are targets of hate crimes and have to contend with the proliferation of anti-trans legislation across the US (Burga 2023). Yet trans groups continue to actively resist such acts of oppression both within these locations, where drag continues to thrive, and beyond such venues, where drag is employed as a deliberate form of protest against anti-queer legislation (Khan 2023, KGW Staff 2023). Thus, even in the post-marriage equality era that is marked by increasing tolerance, queer spaces continue to provide refuge and a sense of belonging. Even in their variously transformed states, they foster a mutually supportive environment that embraces diverse gender expressions and identities while promoting inclusivity and acceptance.

Despite the preponderance of anti-trans legislation, it is generally agreed that the mainstream acceptance of queer spaces has progressed significantly in the past few decades (Branton & Compton 2021). However, this acceptance often manifests as a sanitized version of queerness that appeases a broader audience, leading to a commodification of queerness (Branton & Compton 2021, Sears 2005). In their quest for acceptance, queers of privilege distance themselves from such stigmatization associated with queerness, and instead embrace narratives that align with heteronormative societal values (Spade & Willse 2015). This pursuit of acceptance and status is driven in part by the promise of enhanced economic opportunities, status, and access to the

1 We use "queer" to refer to both gender and sexuality, reflecting its contemporary usage, which extends beyond the binary categories of male and female.

"good life" (Ahmed 2010). This phenomenon, often referred to as "homonormativity," is problematic for several reasons. One, it dilutes the richness of queer culture, often promoting a sterilized version of gay culture that excludes diversity and complexity. Further, homonormativity benefits a privileged subset of queers, often excluding marginalized identities within the queer spectrum (Warner 1999, Reczek & Bosley-Smith 2022, Quick 2021). This process of assimilation and alignment with mainstream norms may reinforce existing inequalities and hierarchies within the queer community rooted in a constraining view of queerness that embraces cis-heteronormative values. In fact, we can see that the "gayborhood" as a hub of counterpublics has been increasingly aligning itself with mainstream publics. This framing reveals a queer spatiality in conflict with itself. Rather than viewing queer space as a monolithic realm in opposition to the mainstream public, we should see these spaces lending themselves to a variety of Fraser's (1990) subaltern queer counterpublics.

In this work we revisit Seattle's historic gay neighborhood within the context of the contemporary transformations of such "gayborhoods" across the country to chart their evolution and situate our cases. In recent decades, "gayborhoods" have gained considerable acceptance and popularity, especially in major cities such as San Francisco and Seattle. While they have been embraced by a significant segment of urban society, this acceptance has resulted in the displacement and dispossession of queer residents who helped shape the neighborhood as a safe space for their peers (Doan & Higgins 2011). These gayborhoods are becoming "inclusively exclusive," particularly toward low-income and non-white queers as well as those with genders outside of the cisgender binary. Such subaltern counterpublics often face violence and displacement under the pretext of protecting the gayborhood (Hanhardt 2013, Manalansan 2005).

Despite literature arguing for the continued relevance of such neighborhoods for queers (Ghaziani 2014), urban planning efforts have been insufficient in controlling for the "straightening" and ensuing gentrification of many such neighborhoods (Chalana 2016). Even as the gayborhood gets codified as the "hub for the LGBTQ community" in city planning documents (City of Seattle OPCD 2019, 6), urban planning continues to reinforce cis male and heteronormative understanding of spaces at the cost of all other groups (Frisch 2002). As gay neighborhoods gentrify, queer spaces must cater to non-queer patrons to survive. Those most impacted by such shifts are queer minorities, including queer non-males (Branton & Compton 2011, Manalansan 2005, Doan & Higgins 2011, Gieseking 2013). Though cities continue to make efforts to identify and preserve queer spaces, as seen in initiatives such as Rainbow Crossing in Seattle's Capitol Hill and the "Rainbow Honor Walk" in San Francisco's Castro district, such branding attempts often backfire as they eventually contribute to the commodification of queer culture and the gentrification of the neighborhood. Ultimately, such well-meaning efforts proved detrimental for the queer community by driving up housing prices and displacing particularly low-income individuals and queers of color (Chalana 2016 Manalansan 2005).

Increasingly, gayborhoods have been molded to be more palatable to the mainstream (i.e. straight) public. While they may still serve marginalized groups, they primarily cater to the most privileged among them: affluent cis men who are overwhelmingly white (Chalana 2016). Further, gay bars in gayborhoods are frequented by non-queer women to hang with their gay boys or by themselves, away from the prying eyes of straight men on their "girls' night out."[2] This version of the gayborhood, the Gayborhood 2.0, is less counterpublic than its predecessors even as it continues to serve the queer community.

Spaces for Queer Non-males

Studies show that queer people who live in communities with higher densities of sexual minorities have lower rates of depression and higher self-esteem (Wienke et al. 2021), and researchers are beginning to acknowledge the importance of gayborhoods in fostering a sense of belonging for minority communities, with the availability of spaces that enable belonging being of particular importance (Allen et al. 2021). Petra Doan's use of autoethnography to describe her experience as a transgender woman operating in gendered space further speaks to the importance of queer spaces, particularly those that act beyond "rigid categorizations of gender" (Doan 2010, 635). Despite the value inherent in queer spaces, we are facing their disappearance on a broad scale (Bitterman & Hess 2021, Ghaziani 2014, Doan & Higgins 2011). This is particularly alarming when we understand that there is already a notable lack of queer space that caters to the non-male[3] community (Mattson 2019).

Today, less than 30 bars for queer women exist in the United States (Colarossi 2022). In contrast, as of 2019, over 750 bars for queer men remained in business. These numbers must be understood in the context of a nationwide decline in queer bars; between 2007 and 2019 there was a 36.6% decrease in gay bars and a 51.1% decrease in lesbian bars (Mattson 2019). It is worth noting that even in the 1980s, at their respective peaks, gay bars consistently outnumbered lesbian bars by more than threefold. Queer bars devoted mainly or completely to gay men have consistently dominated over those serving gay women as well as those catering to queers of color.[4]

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2 Noted through conversations and observations by the second author. For an example of this, see the trope of the straight woman's bachelorette party at a gay bar (Jones 2018).

3 The English language is inherently limited by social norms, and thus the exact terminology used in this paper is imperfect due to the reinforcement of a binary gender category that continues to be ingrained in the English language. The study population is anyone who identifies as queer but not as male, including women and nonbinary people alike. Thus, when referring to the study population, the term "queer non-male" is used. When referring to studies or histories that apply exclusively to queer women, the terms "lesbian" or "queer women" is used. The term "gay" is used exclusively to refer to gay men unless otherwise indicated. Finally, all interview participants are referred to using their self-identified terminology.

4 This notable lack of queer spaces for people of color is unfortunately out of the scope of this paper, but is a critical issue that should be considered in future research.

Beginning in the late 1990s, gay bars that drew both men and women began to outnumber exclusively gay bars.[5] However, the count of inclusive and exclusive gay bars has remained relatively consistent while the number of lesbian bars has not come close to matching these figures (Mattson 2019). The outcome of this disparity is that while both queer men and queer women may find mix-gendered queer bars accessible, gay men enjoy the privilege of having as many exclusive spaces for themselves, while non-male queer people have almost none available to them.

Frisch (2002) identified that queer women network in ways that are less tied to place in contrast to the place-based patterns of gay men. This phenomenon has been studied in the cities of New York and Montreal (Gieseking 2020, Podmore 2006), and is evident in Seattle as well, as will be further explored in this paper (Brown 2004, Mesec 1992). Multiple theories have been proposed to explain this phenomenon, ranging from the differences in capital accumulation within the queer non-male community compared to the gay male community to the forces of gentrification and the spatial consolidation of queer space due to the success of the gayborhood (Gieseking 2020, Frisch 2002, Podmore 2006).

Regardless of the underlying causes, this phenomenon suggests that the queer non-male community organizes in ways that resist normative frameworks of space creation that are rooted in capital accumulation (Lefebvre 2009) or are excluded from it for reasons noted earlier. In any case, the spaces of the queer non-male community persist as counterpublic even within the confines of the gayborhood (Branton & Compton 2021, Sears 2005). In this way, they operate within Fraser's (1990) model of the subaltern counterpublic as one of the many marginalized groups within the queer umbrella, creating networks of resistance even outside of spatial bounds. Yet as Frisch (2002) notes, these patterns often result in the placemaking efforts of the queer non-male community going largely unnoticed within mainstream planning. This lack of acknowledgment denies the queer non-male community the opportunity to receive support and recognition from their cities. Additionally, it undervalues the sweat equity that queers put into the creation of spaces, a task made even more demanding in the face of forces of gentrification and commodification.

Although queer theorists who advocate for the rejection of normative social frameworks have been critiqued as exclusionary, with calls for a shift beyond an anti-normative focus (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, Quick 2021), we argue that making room for those in the queer community that have been largely excluded from creating established spaces of their own to envision their own spaces allows for a built environment that is inclusive of a diverse spectrum of the queer identity. Doing so will provide a platform for these groups to create places that are not limited by mainstream conceptions of space.

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5 Note that the sexuality of these women is not specified by the Damron Guides, which provided the characterization of these spaces.

Methods

While previous research has shed light on the various facets of queer non-male groups, it is essential to recognize the difficulty in anchoring those to specific geographical coordinates or tracing the historical trajectory of their spaces outside of the exclusive bars and conceivably some cafes those groups frequented. The challenge is rooted in the reluctance of queers, notably queer non-males, to draw attention to themselves for fear of harassment, especially prior to the birth of the modern gay rights movement in the 1960s. Additionally, the ephemeral nature of "public" meeting spots frequented by these groups at the time defies comprehensive documentation. Even as we may not know the full scope of queer non-male spaces, it becomes increasingly evident that a large spectrum of counterpublic spaces served this demographic. It is for this reason that our methodology is rooted in the analysis of two contemporary Seattle-based bars frequented by the queer non-male community, although we acknowledge that this is not often how this community organizes (Gieseking 2020). We anchor these two case studies within the history of queer non-male Seattle, drawing as much queer spatial history as we are able within this context of queer ephemerality, with the intent of understanding how Seattle's queer non-male community has historically and is currently organized in relation to established queer spaces and women-focused spaces that have served this community as informal queer spaces.

The paper begins with a historical analysis of the queer non-male community in Seattle, using oral histories, queer archives, queer mapping, and lesbian spatial analysis done by previous scholars (Brown 2004, Mesec 1992, Atkins 2011). Subsequently, it delves into the present condition of Seattle's queer non-male spaces through two distinct yet interrelated cases. The Wildrose, located within the gayborhood, stands as the nation's oldest lesbian bar. It is an example of the traditional, exclusive/inclusive queer bars that proudly resist the straightening that has occurred in other areas of the gayborhood and cater specifically to queer women. Through this, they exhibit their counterpublic identity by creating space that allows for queer women to organize in a space that actively opposes mainstream influences. In contrast, Rough and Tumble Sports Pub, a relatively recent women's sports pub located outside of the gayborhood, is not exclusively queer; nor is its counterpublic status blatantly apparent. Collectively, these spaces illustrate the evolving nature of counterpublic spaces within queer non-male communities.

Both of these case studies are investigated through the use of archival research—including reviews, social media, and news articles. Online reviews of The Wildrose, beginning in 2006, were analyzed along with digital oral histories and information from secondary sources recounting the history of queer Seattle.[6] Due to its newness, archival research on Rough and Tumble includes news articles and video

6 Reviews were analyzed for The Wildrose, as an explicitly lesbian bar. Due to the newness of Rough and Tumble and the fact that it is not an explicitly queer space, reviews were not included in its analysis.

interviews since its opening in December, 2022. Given the excitement surrounding its opening, there was an abundance of information available online about the pub, although few framed the discussion through a queer lens. To augment these sources, the primary author engaged in participant observation in both spaces over the months of March—August 2023. This entailed visiting each space at different hours and days of the week to observe patron behavior in various contexts. The author noted patron characteristics, behavior, and the types of socialization patrons engaged in as well as the physical characteristics of each space and how they were operated by staff. Further, the author used these visits to engage in conversations with queer-non-male-identifying patrons of Rough and Tumble Pub and inquire about what the space meant to them. By engaging directly with queer patrons of the space, the authors were able to account for the inability to look at online reviews written by queer patrons. These patrons also represented a more diverse set of ages than those represented in the semi-structured interviews. One benefit of this method was that it gave a clearer understanding of the more nuanced queer bent that the space has compared to The Wildrose.

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with queer non-male individuals who were familiar with the cases and were part of the primary author's social network as a queer woman. The interview participants were all in their mid to late 20s and identified either as lesbian women or queer/genderqueer. Among them, one participant identified as Asian-Chinese, one as White, and one as mixed East Indian and White heritage. The interviews provided an opportunity to engage in in-depth discussions about the two spaces. While interviews and observation were primary methods, the authors, both queer-identified, also engaged in discussions about this work with their queer friends and acquaintances, who provided additional insights on the two spaces. Drawing from the theory that advocated for the researcher to engage in reflexivity within their own research (Finlay 2002), we recognized the value of these conversations in enriching the research process. Consequently, we decided to include them in the article as supplemental data.

History of Queer Non-male Seattle

In Seattle, the Capitol Hill neighborhood (seen in Fig. 1) is recognized as the "gayborhood," but the history of queer space in Seattle has not been solely confined to this area, especially for those who are not cis men. Queer space for all genders began in the Pioneer Square neighborhood, Seattle's original "skid row," before the Capitol Hill "gayborhood" emerged. The seminal "Gay Seattle" by Gary L. Atkins (2011) devotes a chapter to the history of queer women in Seattle. This chapter highlights how queer, feminist, female-oriented spaces arose around the University of Washington campus and Wallingford neighborhoods (located about three miles north of Capitol Hill, yet physically separated by another neighborhood and a body of water). The form of these spaces notably differed from that of the traditional "gay bar" found in Capitol Hill, although some established lesbian bars did exist.

Figure 1 Rainbow street crossing in the Capitol Hill neighborhood

Michael Brown of the University of Washington created a map of historical queer spaces in the city of Seattle dating back to the pre-1940s. Women's/lesbian bars and taverns first emerged in the 1950s outside of both Capitol Hill and Wallingford/University District, in the "skid row" area of Seattle (Pioneer Square). Other spaces for queer women emerged in Wallingford/University District neighborhoods in the 1970s. During this decade, these neighborhoods saw the emergence of women's and gay women's centers, queer and feminist bookstores, and lesbian group houses, but very few bars/taverns. It wasn't until the mid/late 1970s and early 80s that spaces for queer women began to emerge in Capitol Hill, which became home to more lesbian bars along with other spaces and services for queer women, such as a women's sauna and women-owned erotica store. Some spaces that originated in the Wallingford/University District neighborhoods also began moving to Capitol Hill, while others faced closure. This history reveals that during these decades, Seattle was home to a variety of queer non-male spaces that were alternatives to traditional bars (Brown 2004, Mesec 1992).

In 1971, the Gay Women's Alliance established a permanent space within the University District's YWCA to explicitly create "a place, outside of the bar environment, where gay women can either come and talk or call and talk to other gay women" (Atkins 2011, 135). Other spaces similarly diverged from the traditional gay bar, as numerous women and lesbian collectives began forming for women to reside

and operate businesses in the University District, as well as the nearby Wallingford neighborhood (Brown 2004, Mesec 1992, Atkins 2011). Examples include Red & Black Books, located near the University of Washington before relocating to Capitol Hill in 1996 and eventually closing around 2003 (Brown 2004), It's About Time Bookstore and Innerspace Coffeehouse, which shared a space and were women's-only (Mesec 1992, 49-50), and the Coffee Coven, a women-focused group that offered an "alternative to the bars" for queer women through social, educational, and cultural events (Pettis 2002, 178). Other, community-based lesbian groups and networks formed, either within established women-oriented spaces or through independent initiatives. Some of these included the self-described "granola crew" at the Little Bread Company, the LezBeFriends queer string band, a queer network affiliated with the Feminist Karate Union, and the "Lesbians of Color" group (Pettis 2002 178-179, 185, Mesec 1992, 49-51).

While some lesbian and women's groups operated in explicitly political ways (Atkins 2011, Mesec 1992), other spaces resisted mainstream ideals simply through their existence. Food co-ops and queer/female bookstores would fall into this category. In the local queer female newspaper, Out and About, a woman commented on her experience working for the local C.C. Grains, noting that it offered her alternative ways of thinking, along with "a group of women committed to finding another way besides hierarchical, capitalistic, imperialistic ways" (Atkins 2011, 140). It is important to note that these examples reveal how queer women worked collectively, through lived resistance, to create female spaces that challenged capitalist logics, which limit spatial enactments and particularly queer spatialities.

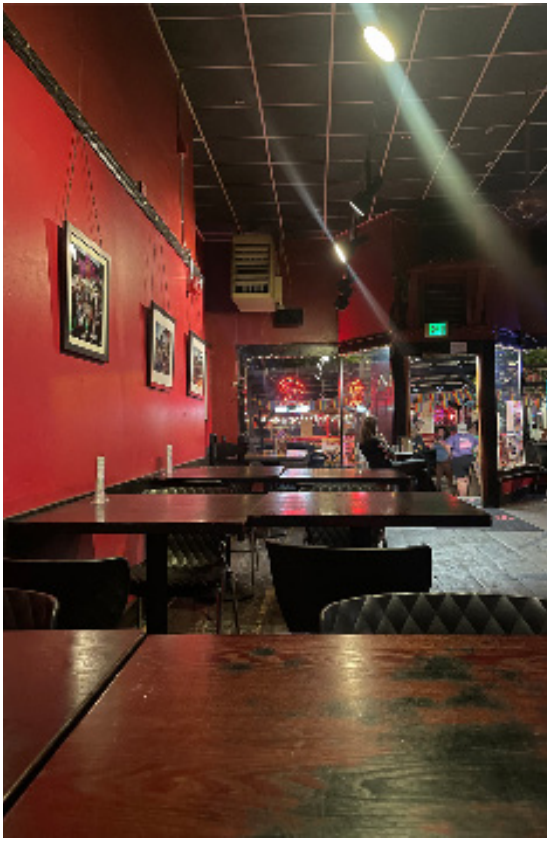
During this time, there was notable tension between queer women and queer men, and the gay bar emerged as a contentious node. One woman contended that the lesbian bars served more as social spaces and were less oriented toward hook-ups than gay bars were. In an issue of Pandora, a women's newspaper, a woman described the contrasting atmospheres at the Silver Slipper, a lesbian bar, on a regular night versus an evening when many gay men were in attendance for a drag show. She found the latter experience "very depressing" (Atkins 2011, 146). It was within this climate, although slightly later in 1984, that our first case study, The Wildrose, emerged.

The Wildrose

The Wildrose, the oldest surviving lesbian bar in the United States, opened in the Capitol Hill neighborhood in 1984. Differing from a typical bar, The Wildrose offered brunches, talks, and concerts, all catering to women, yet its founder, Bryher Herak, emphasized that rather than being a "women's only place," it was founded as a "women's place" (Atkins 2011, 153-154). Today, The Wildrose still operates in this framework, with weekly taco Tuesdays, trivia, karaoke, and "cheap date night" (offering $2 wells) as well as other regular events like speed dating, drag bingo, and queer songwriters

night.[7] The bar continues to identify exclusively as a lesbian bar, but has extended its welcome to other queer non-male groups through intentional efforts. Now the speed dating events it hosts are advertised as being trans/enby inclusive and feature a night dedicated to gray/ace people. The bar includes they/them pronouns alongside "she/her" in its Instagram profile, and has gender-neutral bathrooms.

The space itself, pictured in Figure 2, is best described as a "dive bar," with tables in a main seating area near the bar, with another section dedicated to a dance floor and a small seating area. The lights are low, the decor is vintage and neon, and the bathroom walls are covered in flyers advertising queer events and services. There is an outdoor pavilion area, true of many of the bars in Seattle post-Covid-19.



7 This information was sourced from The Wildrose's website (https://www.thewildrosebar.com/) and Instagram profile, accessed July 21, 2023.

Figure 2 The interior of The Wildrose. The first three were taken on a Tuesday evening at 10:00 PM as most patrons socialized in the outside covered area. The last one was taken on more lively a Friday evening at 10:30 PM.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Wildrose faced the threat of permanent closure but managed to raise $89,824 through a GoFundMe campaign (GoFundMe n.d.), securing its survival. While it was not feasible for all patrons to contribute to the campaign, there was an overwhelming desire to secure the bar's survival. This is an indication of the impact the bar has on the local community, which can also be gleaned from reviews of The Wildrose posted on Google and Yelp.[8]

The Wildrose has earned a reputation as an exclusive/inclusive women's bar, often perceived as unwelcoming to male patrons. It proudly flaunts its identity as a bar for queer women, conveying through overt and subtle means who should and should not frequent the bar (Earles 2019, Fobear 2012). In doing so, it creates a sphere of resistance against the typical gay bar, which caters primarily to gay men and, to a lesser degree, straight women. Wildrose serves as a space for the formation of a subaltern counterpublic, allowing for queer women to socialize among themselves, foster friendship, find lovers and exert agency in shaping their own destinies. While not explicitly enforced, the underlying message received by local queers is that this is primarily a queer women's space. For some, this perception extends to include only cis-gendered, lesbian-presenting, and White women.

The Wildrose's reputation of being unwelcoming to men, gay or straight, is as old as the bar itself (Brownstone 2017). From interactions that the authors have

8 Accessed July 21, 2023.

had with their queer networks, it appears that the majority of male queers choose to respect Wildrose as a non-male space. A white gay male friend of the primary author shared an anecdote about having to tell a male friend that they couldn't go into The Wildrose because it is a lesbian bar. However, a few, particularly cis gay men, have been dismissive of the bar as an unwelcoming space that harbors "angry dykes" (conversations recounted by the second author).

Heterosexual-presenting couples are also discouraged in The Wildrose. During a visit to the bar, the primary author witnessed an instance of the bouncer telling a group of straight-presenting couples that "this IS a lesbian bar" and offered to provide recommendations for other (read straight) bars in the area, evidently attempting to discourage their entry. Occasionally straight men might unwittingly find themselves at The Wildrose but they typically leave after figuring out the nature of the establishment. It is crucial to note that there are straight men who would not be discouraged from visiting the bar with the sole purpose of hitting on women. Although infrequent, such instances raise concerns among lesbians and other non-male patrons of the bar about intrusion and safety.

The Wildrose may not be an atypical lesbian bar of its vintage, which were established as exclusive/inclusive spaces for queer women who often felt unwelcome or faced harassment in both gay and straight bars alike. In a study of Amsterdam's lesbian scene, Fobear (2012) observed that this form of exclusive inclusivity is a particular type of lesbian placemaking practiced by an older generation, but is actively resisted by younger lesbians. However, she notes that despite this divide, both generations recognize a need for a "space where they are included fully" (Fobear 2012, 743). This sentiment was reiterated by our interview participants, all in their mid to late 20s, one of whom shared that they see continued importance and relevance for affinity spaces across minority communities. Another shared that in exclusively non-male queer spaces she feels more of a sense of belonging, particularly when compared to other queer spaces that are mostly full of gay men and straight women. All three participants noted that gay white men are generally more privileged and that most queer spaces cater to them.[9]

The Wildrose continues to hold a special significance for many queer non-males who engage with the space in ways that go beyond its function as a bar, valuing it as a cherished space that nurtures a sense of belonging. As such, the bar becomes a space of refuge for those outside of the non-male identity who are still marginalized within the queer community. This is exemplified in a comment: "As a transgender guy I have always felt welcome at the Rose, which isn't always true in lesbian bars."[10] This sentiment underscores the bar's commitment to providing a safe and welcoming space,

9 This was also noted by a white gay male friend of the primary author as they were discussing this paper.

10 Although this work focuses primarily on queer non-male spaces, we felt it important to include perspectives of trans and gay men to understand the broader impact of these spaces across the queer community.

resonating with other comments in a similar vein, such as "This place helped me feel comfortable in my skin back in the day when I was in the middle of 'coming out.' I know it's done the same for others too."

The interview participants expressed similar sentiments as online commenters. Even those who were not regular patrons noted that the bar was still important to them simply due to its existence, with one stating: "I want The Wildrose to exist forever as this staple lesbian bar… it's a very central, fun gathering place for the sapphics of Seattle." The interview participant who does frequent the bar spoke of how in The Wildrose "people are able to be whoever they want … they can be as queer as they want or whatever they want to do, and I think that creates a safe space for me—seeing other people being their authentic selves and not necessarily being judged by other people." She noted that the clientele and bartenders being "female-identifying" and "alternative" also contributed to the feeling of belonging. And even as she frequents the bar primarily to hang out with friends, she values the space for those seeking new friends or lovers. She mentioned that friends who had moved to Seattle from out of town had found new friends from The Wildrose who helped them forge connections beyond the confines of the bar.

Despite being hugely supported by the queer non-male community in Seattle, The Wildrose has several detractors, mainly those that identify as straight or male as gleaned through online platforms. Much of the expressed frustrations center around the perception of the bar as unwelcoming to queer non-males as noted earlier. Others recounted instances of experiencing rudeness and disrespect based on their gender identity/transness, gender presentation, race and/or country of origin either personally or through their friends. The phenomenon of exclusion for BIPOC queers aligns with existing literature that links queer space with whiteness (Oswin 2008, DasGupta and Dasgupta 2018). While our interview participants acknowledged the issue of race dynamics, it was often framed in relation to whiteness and gender binaries, as participants discussed the problem of "white gay men." However, as the online reviews of The Wildrose indicate, practices of racial exclusion can also be experienced within queer non-male spaces. This pattern follows that of the "Penis Police," wherein lesbian spaces are policed according to preconceptions of what qualifies as "woman," thus leading to the exclusion of both trans people and women of color. This policing is in response to the very real threats that women face under a patriarchal society but only serves to further normative conceptions of gender and sexuality (Earles 2019). This is akin to Hanhardt's (2013) understanding of gay neighborhoods' policing of space in the name of protection for lesbians and gays and reveals how practices of homonormativity occur within more marginalized queer populations (Oswin 2008). Ultimately, this also aligns with Fraser's (1990) definition of subaltern counterpublics, which, while being spaces for marginalized voices, can become spaces of exclusion themselves.

There is some inconsistency between views expressed through The Wildrose's social media and the experiences shared in online reviews of the bar. While it is clear

that the space is protective of its queerness and femaleness (see Fig. 4), the manifestation of this is in conflict as the bar reckons with what it means to be an inclusive queer space and a historic lesbian bar. Conversations and formal interviews offered more nuanced insight into The Wildrose, as did looking at oral histories. Within the latter, similar themes emerged in online reviews. Nonbinary interviewees spoke about feeling the erasure of their identities within The Wildrose and lesbian spaces in general, sharing that they were "constantly misgendered" or felt "pushback" against their nonbinary identity, noting that these patterns are a trend within lesbian crowds as a whole. However, others felt more welcomed within The Wildrose, with one person stating: "For trans women, it feels like a super important space to hang out with friends and not worry about being harassed by people" (Brownstone 2017). Ultimately, this calls into question the safety of an all-female space for individuals that actively push against rigid gender categorizations. This tension underscores the "tyranny of gendered space" that Doan (2010) notes as being in conflict with the realities of a gender spectrum. The deployment of the "penis police" as a form of exclusionary feminism (Earles 2019) prompts us to ask who holds authority to determine membership in a women's space.

Figure 3 "We Will Not Be Erased" sign at The Wildrose

The dissonance within the queer community regarding the inclusivity, or lack thereof, of The Wildrose also underscores the scarcity of queer, non-male social spaces. As a few online reviewers noted, they felt conflicted in their mixed feelings towards the bar, recognizing its value and significance as one of the few remaining lesbian bars in the United States. In the context of the gay male bar scene, a space that may not be fully inclusive or fails to meet a patron's specific needs is less consequential given the magnitude of available options. However, the dearth of alternatives for queer non-

males means that the community has limited choices when seeking spaces that are truly welcoming. While this limitation does not excuse exclusive practices, it puts The Wildrose in a challenging position, as it is burdened to cater to the entire spectrum of the queer, non-male community with one space. The lack of queer non-male spaces sentiment resonated throughout the interviews—particularly those that weren't oriented around alcohol. Two of the participants mentioned that they don't frequent The Wildrose simply because they do not drink much or like to go out, and the third mentioned that even though she does go out often, she recognizes that there is a need for other members of the community to have spaces that are not oriented around alcohol, stating that "[there's not a] queer space that has been more relaxed—[not] a dance club or a legitimate like dive bar or bar bar."

Despite the limitation of a traditional queer bar, The Wildrose's enduring legacy as a holdout lesbian bar in the country is consistently appreciated throughout reviews, oral histories, and interviews. It is generally recognized that the bar needs to protect itself as the last remaining lesbian bar in Seattle.

Rough & Tumble Sports Pub

Rough & Tumble Pub is a women's sports pub that opened in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood in December of 2022 (Varriano 2023), some distance removed from The Wildrose in Capitol Hill. The bar provides equal visibility to both men's and women's sports, ensuring that at least half the screens are dedicated to women's sports at all times (Vargas 2023), showing a range of sports from soccer to rock climbing to roller derby (Evans 2022). The pub aims to be a space inclusive of all ages and genders (InsideLines Podcast 2023) and was inspired by the owner's struggle to find a pub that would broadcast women's soccer, particularly Seattle's O.L. Reign games. In the short time of its existence, the pub has garnered a strong following. During the Women's World Cup in 2023, the pub hosted watch parties that regularly reached full capacity, with people waiting in line to enter. One watch party even featured O.L. Reign players in attendance, who are often patrons of the pub (InsideLines Podcast 2023).

Rough & Tumble is not a queer bar, but upon entering, you are greeted by a large LGBTQIA+ pride flag and the side-by-side jerseys of Sue Bird and Megan Rapinoe, two prominent female Seattle athletes who are not only stars of their respective teams but also engaged to each other. The owner of Rough & Tumble herself acknowledges that while it is not a queer bar "per se," "the queer community is a deep part of the sports community… In doing something for women and sports together, the pub kind of naturally became a place of information for a lot of people in the queer world" (Condor n.d.). During a visit to the pub on a night of the Women's World Cup, multiple visitors were seen donning rainbow soccer paraphernalia, with one displaying a Pride flag featuring one of Seattle's O.L. Reign soccer team's players (Fig. 5). Another wore a shirt that read "Love Who You Love and Watch Women's Sports." The atmosphere was charged

with enthusiasm as patrons cheered when Megan Rapinoe commercials celebrated the LGBTQIA+ community.

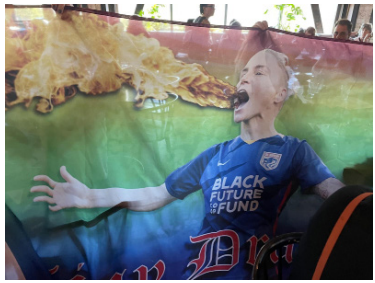


Figure 4 Rainbow pride flag featuring a player for Seattle's O.L. Reign soccer team

This atmosphere at Rough & Tumble mirrors that of the O.L. Reign games, where fans sport rainbow gear and the live band Reign City Riot, which performs at the games, is sponsored by the local LGBTQIA+ Rainbow City Performing Arts Association (Fig. 6).[11] "Behind the visible queerness in women's sports — and why it matters," a recent Washington Post article, discussed this phenomenon, with a focus on the large number of women athletes who are openly queer. The article also highlighted how this impacts the composition of the fanbase, stating that "when you know there are large numbers of athletes on the field who are gay, it signals to queer fans that the space is for them" (De La Cretaz 2022). When one of our interview participants was asked why they liked women's sports, their immediate response was: "Women's sports are gay!" The two other interviewees made similar comments about the overlap between women's sports and queer non-males.

Figure 5 Reign Pride soccer game (EverOut n.d., O.L. Reign 2023)

11 According to the Rainbow City Performing Arts website, accessed August 3, 2023.

Seattle's women's sports scene can even be tied back to The Wildrose. On the night of the Rough & Tumble watch party for the Women's World Cup game, the primary author was invited by her queer friends to a watch party at The Wildrose. The basketball star Sue Bird, mentioned earlier, is quoted on The Wildrose's Instagram expressing the importance of the pub in her journey of self-acceptance as a queer woman (@thewildrosebar, June 11, 2023). At an O.L. Reign game in June (notably, the theme of this game was Pride), a fan held up a sign announcing an afterparty at The Wildrose. Ironically, many of the Reign players ended up at the official afterparty at Rough & Tumble. Even as The Wildrose and Rough & Tumble may appear as competitors for the same audience, they are not rivals, especially considering the dearth of queer women and non-male spaces. The owner of Wildrose has emphasized the importance of Rough & Tumble (Evans 2022).

The owner of Rough & Tumble envisioned an inclusive space for "all the people in our community—from straight to gay to trans—all felt comfortable." (Varriano 2023). When speaking with queer patrons who identify as gay women and nonbinary, it becomes evident that the significance of Rough & Tumble extends way beyond its presentation of women's sports. One patron expressed that the space made them "feel seen and represented" emphasizing the significance of its diversity as it welcomes "not just queer people—not just women." Another valued Rough & Tumble as is a queer space where she felt comfortable bringing her children. She also appreciated the space as an "older single" person who "[doesn't] want to do the online thing." During a slow night at the pub, the primary author observed a group of filmmakers who were in town for the screening of their lesbian documentary. They were celebrating at a nearby table, and one of them even stood up to give a speech to fellow patrons.

The design of Rough & Tumble, pictured in figure 7, has been crafted with intentionality. The pub is large and open with big windows, multiple seating options, and an outdoor patio area. Several television screens are placed throughout the establishment, with the largest screen located above the designated bar section with access limited to those 21 and above. The space also features pool tables and a photo booth. Describing her intentions in creating the pub, the owner stated: "It's not just a safe space, it's not just a beautiful place to watch women's sports. I wanted to create a space of equality" (Varriano 2023). A quick look at the menu reveals dishes named after prominent women athletes, alongside mixed drinks labeled "Equality" and "Equity." This intentional use of politically charged language signals that the pub seeks to deliberately foster a space of resistance, positioning itself as a counterpublic from the outset.

One of the interview participants regards The Wildrose and Rough & Tumble as the primary queer spaces she frequents. This is noteworthy, given that both are located significantly further away from her compared to a gay bar in her neighborhood

that attracts older gay men.[12] If Rough & Tumble were closer to her, she shared that she would visit more frequently because of its relaxed and social environment, which stands out from most queer spaces in Seattle she is familiar with. She has forged connections and made queer friends through her interactions at the pub.

Figure 6 The interior of Rough & Tumble Sports Pub taken during the Women's World Cup

Rough & Tumble serves a different purpose than The Wildrose. Like many of its predecessors in Seattle, such as the Feminist Karate Union or Innerspace Coffeehouse, it is a women-positive space, but not specifically a queer space. Nonetheless, interview participants identified it as a popular spot for both themselves and their queer network. When asked why, one participant mentioned that the space "becomes a more inclusive space because it's catering towards a minority." However, Rough & Tumble also takes intentional steps to foster queer inclusivity. In June, the pub hosted several pride events and was listed as a top LGBTQIA+-owned establishment to visit by the Seattle Times (Varriano 2023).

Rough & Tumble defies the typical narrative of the "lesbian bar" and creates a space that allows for an intersection of identities to flourish. It allows for the fusion of queerness and women-positivity in a seemingly straight bar setting. This intertwining generates a distinct queer counterpublic space, one that does not overtly emphasize its queerness, but integrates it into its identity. The result is a bar that is not as self-con-

12 Notably, the neighborhood she lives in is Wallingford, the previously queer female area of Seattle, and the bar she mentions is the only remaining gay bar from that era.

scious as The Wildrose, yet it provides a space that deeply resonates with those who embrace it. Although it may appear mainstream in its business model, Rough & Tumble actively takes steps to subvert the patriarchal manifestations within capitalism. The pub's owner emphasized that an important goal of the establishment is to boost advertising revenue for women's sports, which has long suffered from underfunding and significant pay disparities in comparison to their male counterparts (Fox13 2023, Adelphi University 2021). While Rough & Tumble is first and foremost a women's sports pub, it has intentionally positioned itself as an inclusive space. The Rough & Tumble case demonstrates how the intersection of identities can be embraced alongside, and indeed as a result of, a queer counterpublic space. As one queer non-male patron aptly states: "Everyone's there for the same reason—and [that] makes it safe."

Conclusion

The analysis of queer non-male spaces in Seattle has revealed two distinct types of counterpublic spaces: the exclusive/inclusive queer non-male space that must actively resist the capitalist mainstreaming of its surrounding "gayborhood" to maintain its status as a counterpublic space, and the non-exclusive/inclusive women-positive space. The latter provides refuge for queer people while also welcoming the general public. Yet, it functions as a counterpublic space through the active and vocal empowering of non-males within a patriarchal context. Although this work delves into two present-day cases, the exploration of queer non-male spaces throughout Seattle's history suggests that this pattern is not unique to the current era. Seattle's queer women's history brings to light the forgotten past of queerness that was not confined within a single neighborhood, later to take shape as the gayborhood. While the recognition of Capitol Hill as Seattle's gayborhood is undoubtedly noteworthy, the queer women's history of the Wallingford and University District neighborhoods has faded into obscurity. Further research is needed to uncover the complexity of queer non-males spaces, particularly those that were ephemeral and clandestine, expanding on the work of scholars who study how queer non-males operate in space (Gieseking 2020, Podmore 2006, Mesec 1992, Atalay & Doan 2020).

The cases demonstrate that although there are significantly fewer lesbian bars in comparison to gay bars, queer non-males have continued to exert their agency in defining their own existence through the creation of spaces. Contrary to the dominant narrative of a gayborhood primarily catering to cis gay men, queer non-male people have carved out their own places of belonging within the confines of this environment or outside of it. The Wildrose is not just among the last surviving lesbian bars in the country; it stands as one of the few remaining queer spaces that resist the commodification and co-opting of queer bars for and by straight-identifying people (Branton & Compton 2021). While Rough & Tumble Pub is not necessarily a space designated for queer people, it has become a place for non-male queer people due to the community's draw to women's sports and an intentional environment that is welcoming

and empowering for people who do not identify as men. In doing so, the pub offers an alternative counterpublic space that is distinct from the traditional gay/lesbian bar. Although it is a pub, the owner has disassociated it from being seen as primarily an alcohol-centric space, making it open to everyone (Condor n.d.). Its light and airy feel, well-developed food menu, and openness to children are just some examples of the intentional cultivation of a place that is not a typical bar. The consequence of this is a space for queer people that doesn't have to involve "going out."

The need to have non-male spaces that are not centered around alcohol was emphasized in the interviews and oral histories (Pettis 2002, 159, 178). This is a particularly important concern when considering the prevalence of alcohol dependence within the queer community (Parks 1999). When interview participants were asked what types of queer spaces they would create if given the chance, the responses ranged from queer art spaces to bookstores to coffee shops to places to find volunteering opportunities (or some mix of these options). These types of queer spaces did exist in Seattle's past. However, they have since disappeared leaving a void, especially for queer non-males.[13] Future work should prioritize centering the voices within the queer non-male community to more accurately present queer history and to better understand the needs and aspirations of this group for effective and inclusive planning and policy purposes.

The emergence of Rough and Tumble Sports Pub is a promising indication of future queer non-male counterpublic spaces that deliberately diverge from the stereotypical "lesbian bar" archetype with a reduced focus on alcohol and commitment to non-exclusive inclusivity. Although it may not readily appear as a counterpublic space, it functions as a gathering space of queer non-males who resist normative notions that confine queerness to a narrowly defined setting of a gay bar, which are increasingly being commodified. Further, the pub's overwhelmingly inclusive practices and vocal support of the non-male community create a space that fosters a sense of belonging for queer non-males without attempting to define who does or does not belong in its space.

In the post-marriage equality era, hate crimes against queers, while less prevalent, still disproportionately target genderqueer, non-binary, and particularly trans individuals who have to routinely endure discrimination and violence. In that regard, The Wildrose continues to hold relevance for non-male queer groups, despite its primarily identifying as a lesbian bar. Such an exclusive/inclusive model of counterpublicness ensures that this group finds a queer space that fosters the development of a subaltern counterpublic, which can assert the needs and desires of these queer non-males. This underscores why the bar must constantly stay vigilant: monitoring guests, policing behaviors, and strictly enforcing drink policies to safeguard this vital space

13 Red and Black Books and It's About Time Bookstore were both bookstores serving the queer non-male community in the Wallingford/University District neighborhoods beginning in the 1970s. Red and Black Books eventually relocated to Capitol Hill before its eventual closure and It's About Time closed in 1985 (Brown 2004).

and ensure that its patrons are free from harassment and violence. In fact, on a visit to the bar, the primary author noticed the strict enforcement of bar rules, despite it being a slow Tuesday night with no more than 15 patrons, with the bartender enforcing the rule that any drink unattended left must be dumped and that no drinks were allowed outside of the outdoor pavilion area (Fig. 7). In addition to the small clientele the bar relies on for functioning, it is facing numerous challenges, including pressures of transformation within a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Yet within this climate, The Wildrose remains stubbornly committed to its mission.

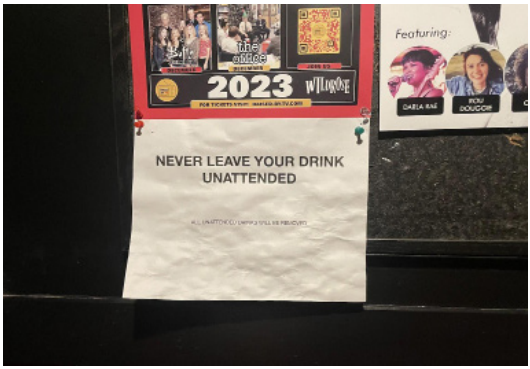


Figure 7 A sign telling customers of The Wildrose not to leave their drinks unattended

While efforts are ongoing to preserve queer non-male histories as part of queer histories within the broader context of queer narratives, considerable work remains in this domain. The Lesbian Bar Project is a commendable advocacy effort, highlighting the value of lesbian bars in fostering community building, activism and identity formation, while also raising awareness around the disappearance of queer non-male spaces. Although new lesbian bars are beginning to emerge in some cities like LA (Chiriguayo 2023), their numbers are not proportionate to the prevalence of gay bars. Furthermore, the deliberate rejection of mainstreaming puts these bars at risk of closure due to economic pressures (Doan & Higgins 2011). Indeed, it is essential to acknowledge that queer non-males may not primarily identify with established queer space (Gieseking 2020, Frisch 2002). This underscores the fundamental purpose of subaltern counterpublics in the first place.

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